DAWAH BOOKLETS

Hijab in Islam

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HIJAB IN THE LIGHT OF THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

This book is based on an authoritative Arabic book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah*, by Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, a famous scholar and traditionist. It was translated by this writer and initially published in condensed form in the quarterly, *Islam and the Modern Age*.[1]

The third edition of the original work with some additions is before me. The question of *hijab* (veil), or *purdah* in Urdu, the author tells us, has been discussed in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith.

From the author's point of view, a woman's face is not included in the parts of the body that need to be compulsorily covered. He suggests, however, that it is better to cover it. He agrees with those who, in spite of holding the view that the face is not to be covered as a rule, nevertheless advocate the covering of the face in order to discourage mischief, in view of the general moral degradation in present-day society. Here is one of the traditions referred to by him to support his argument.

'Aishah says that Muslim women used to attend the morning prayer led by the Prophet wrapped in a sheet of cloth. Afterwards, when they returned home, it was so dark that they could not be recognized.

This narrative makes it clear that their faces were not covered. Had their faces been covered, the question of their being recognized would not arise. The phrase "because of the darkness they could not be recognized" makes sense only if the faces, by which individuals are recognized, were uncovered.

Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani takes a similar stand as regards the covering of a woman's hands, quoting a famous tradition narrated by Ibn 'Abbas. It says that once the Messenger of God addressed the women to urge them to give alms (*sadaqah*). Afterwards Bilal ibn Rabah, a Companion of the Prophet, spread a sheet, on which the women began throwing their rings.

After quoting this tradition the author quotes Ibn Hazm:

> Ibn 'Abbas saw the hands of women in the presence of the Prophet. This proves that the face as well as the hands are not included in the parts of the body to be covered. Indeed all other parts except these have to be veiled.[2]

He further writes:

> My heart bleeds to see the way many women of today adorn themselves, crossing all limits of decency. But the remedy does not lie in declaring forbidden what God has permitted.

He goes on to say that it is clear from the Qur'an, the Hadith and the practice of the Companions and *tabi'un* (companions of the Prophet's Companions) that, whenever a woman steps out of her home, it is incumbent upon her to cover herself completely so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands.[3] According to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's findings the following rules of *hijab* are applicable:

1. The whole body, except for the exempted parts should be covered.

2. But any veil which in itself becomes an attraction is to be avoided.

3. Garments should not be semi-transparent.

4. Dress should not be tight fitting.

5. Garments should not be perfumed.

6. The form of dress should not in any way resemble that of men.

7. It should not resemble that of non-believers.

8. Garments should not reflect worldly honour.[4]

The first rule of *hijab* has been derived from the following passages of the Qur’an:

> Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed; to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women-servants, their slave

> girls, male attendants lacking in natural vigour, and children who have no knowledge of sex. And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets. Believers, turn to God together in repentance, that you may prosper.[5]

The second verse in this connection is as follows:

> Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters and the wives of true believers to draw their veils close round them. That is more proper, so that they may be recognized (as virtuous women) and not molested. God is Forgiving and Merciful.[6]

The author interprets the wording of 33:59, "to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed," to mean that the hands and face are exempt from covering. He draws his argument in support of this from the Hadith.

After studying many *ahadith* in connection with the verse from *surah* 33 of the Qur'an, he writes: "It is clear from the instances drawn from the Qur'an and the Hadith that, although it accords with the *shari'ah*

and it is preferable for a woman to cover her face, it is not compulsory for her to do so. It would be better if women followed this practice, but there is no harm if they do not."[7]

The second rule of *hijab*, according to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's research, is that *hijab* in itself should not be a source of attraction. It should not become a display of finery referred to in the Qur'an as *tabarruj:*

> Stay in your homes and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of *Jahiliyah* (period before Islam). Attend to your prayers, give alms to the poor, and obey God and His Messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanliness from you (members of the family), and to purify you.[8]

According to the author, the intention of this verse is that a woman should not display her beauty and attraction in such a way as to produce carnal desires in the hearts of men. Since the purpose of the gown (*jilbab*) is to hide such attractions, it is, therefore, unimaginable that the gown itself should become a source of attraction.[9]

He states, morever, that in Islam the displaying of feminine attractions is a habit so important to avoid that it has been bracketed in the scriptures along with such unlawful things as polytheism, adultery and theft. He has collected a number of *ahadith* to support his argument.

The third rule of the *hijab*, according to the writer, is that the garment should not be thin because a thin cloth can never provide cover. And a diaphanous garment only accentuates the attraction of a woman and becomes a potential source of mischief.[10] The author quotes many sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, one of which is as follows:

> Towards the end (in the last phase) there will be women among my followers who will appear naked, or as good as naked, even when wearing clothes.

The fourth condition set by the writer is that the garment should be loose-fitting. He again supports his argument by quoting various sayings of the Prophet. Finally he has given an instance where Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter) expressed her disapproval of a dead woman being wrapped in

such a shroud as might display her body as being a woman's. He writes: "See for yourself how the dearest daughter of the Prophet considered the use of such a cloth detestable as would not properly drape feminine parts of a dead woman's body. Certainly such a garment for a living woman would be far worse."[11]

The fifth condition of *hijab* is that the garment should not be perfumed (while going out). There are many traditions forbidding women to wear perfume while going out. After quoting four traditions, he writes: "Ibn Daqiq al-'Id writes that in this *hadith* a woman is forbidden to go to the mosque wearing perfume, because it stimulates carnal desires in men. So when it is forbidden for women wearing perfume to go to the mosque, their use of perfume when they go out shopping, or for any other purpose, is all the more sinful. Al-Haythami writes that going out wearing adornments and perfume is a major sin, even if it is done with the husband's permission."[12]

The sixth conditon of *hijab* is that a woman's garments should not resemble those of men. Here is one of the traditions he has quoted to this effect:

> The Prophet has condemned men who imitate women and women who imitate men.[13]

From this tradition the writer comes to the conclusion that a garment which in most parts resembles those of men is not permissible for women, even if it covers her adequately.[14]

The seventh rule of *hijab* is that it should not resemble that worn by non-believers. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani says that any similarity to non-believers must be avoided, in matters of worship, festivals and dress.[15] The Qur'an states this briefly, but the sunnah provides the detail. One of the verses of the Qur'an on which he bases this argument states that it is "so that they may not be like those who were given the scriptures before this..."[16] He quotes Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir who construe this verse as meaning that imitation of non-believers is not allowed in Islam.

Then he quotes the tradition in which the Prophet forbade adopting the ways of non-believers in prayers, funeral prayers, sacrifice, food, dress, etiquette, etc.[17]

The eighth rule of *hijab* is that a woman's garments should not reflect worldly honour. Here is a *hadith* to this effect:

> One who wears the mantle of fame in this world will be made to wear the robe of dishonour in the hereafter.[18]

His concluding remarks are: "The garment should cover the entire body of a woman except the face and hands, and should not become an attraction in itself. Neither should it be thin, nor tight. It should not accentuate the body. It should not be perfumed or resemble those worn by men or non-believing women. It should not suggest fame."[19]

THE TRANSLATOR'S VIEWS

The Qur'an says: "Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to

preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed."[20]

The wording of the verse, "except such as are normally displayed," gives rise to the question of what it is that has been exempted here from being covered. The theologians and the commentators have two views on the subject. These two views are based on the fact that beauty is of two kinds—one natural (by birth) and the other artificial (that is acquired by the use of make-up, etc.). One group says that the word 'beauty' here refers to both kinds of beauty, whereas the other group believes that it is artificial beauty which is referred to in this verse.

Ibn Mas'ud, Hasan, Ibn Sirin, and Abul Jawza' have interpreted this verse as referring to the kind of beauty which depends on clothes, ornaments, etc. They are of the opinion that when a woman goes out, she should not display these deliberately. However, if any part of such adornment is unintentionally exposed, for instance, if a gust of wind displaces the covering sheet momentarily, this is deemed excusable.

The other point of view finds support from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, 'Ata', 'Ikrama, Sa'ib ibn Jubayr, Abu ash-Sha'tha', Dahhak, Ibrahim Nakh'i, etc. They infer from the phrase "such as are normally displayed" the exemption of face and hands.

This interpretation is based on the tradition recorded by Abu Dawud in his *Sunan*: 'Aishah says that once Asma bint Abu Bakr came wearing a thin garment. The Prophet turned his face away from her and said: "Asma, it is not proper for a woman after having reached puberty to expose any part of her body except these." Then he pointed to his hands and face.[21]

That is why there are two theological schools of thought. The Hanafis and Malikis believe that the face and hands are not to be covered, while the followers of Imam Shafi'i and Hanbali maintain that a woman has to be fully veiled. In this view, natural as well as acquired beauty have to be completely veiled. It is unlawful for a woman to unveil any part of her body when she goes out. To them, what is exempted is that which gets exposed

unintentionally. They will be excused for that. Thus the face and the hands are the parts that are forbidden to be exposed unnecessarily.[22]

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad 'Usmani gives the following commentary pertaining to this verse of the Qur'an:

> To this writer the interpretation of *zinah* (beauty) as adornment would be more appropriate and comprehensive in this context. The word adornment encompasses all kinds of beauty, whether natural or acquired; whether inborn beauty or that of beautiful garments or make-up. In short, a woman is forbidden to display adornment of any kind before anyone not permitted by the *shari'ah*. If a woman cannot keep these parts veiled as ordained for reasons beyond her control, or for any compelling reason, she cannot be held responsible for that (provided it is not likely to generate any mischief.)
>
> It is evident from the Hadith and *athar* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's Companions) that the face and hands are

exempt because it is not possible to keep them covered while performing various chores of daily life and even religious rites. If they are ordered to be strictly covered, it will create great difficulties for women in carrying out their jobs. The theologians have considered the feet also to be exempted parts. It must be clearly understood, however, that unveiling is permitted strictly on the basis of necessity. Men are forbidden to set their eyes on them. Perhaps this is why before exempting women from covering their face and hands (verse 31), men are commanded to lower their gaze and guard their modesty in verse 30. Thus the permission to unveil a part of the body does not give licence to others to set their eyes on them.[23]

EXPERIMENTAL VERIFICATION

Of all the family problems in advanced countries, divorce tops the list. The fact that the majority of marriages in these countries end up in divorce has ruined family life completely, for children do not enjoy the love and care of parents who are still

alive, whereas it was formerly only death which separated children from their parents. Children there grow up like uncared-for weeds, adding to the list of criminals. It is generally accepted that the majority of juvenile delinquents are the product of broken homes.

Divorce was not so common in former times. Then how has it reached such proportions now? The sole reason for this is traceable to the promiscuity of what in religious terminology is called unrestricted society. This life style devoid of moral constraints has made it possible for men and women to live together like the fish in the sea. With such a life style, permissiveness is unavoidable. One's loyalties keep changing. In a segregated society, where interaction between men and women is almost non-existent, a man associates only with his spouse, which keeps him from forming new loyalties, while in a free society he comes upon new faces every day, one better than the other. He then feels like abandoning the old face in preference to the new and more attractive one. What is happening in the West is that the couple live together for some time after marriage and when they come across a better

face, they go in for divorce to start a new life. This fact has been plainly stated by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Commenting on the increasing rate of divorce in western society, it says:

> Actors, authors and other groups that have many contacts with the opposite sex tend to have a high divorce frequency.[24]

This western report links the high rate of divorce to regular contacts. This is significant in that it proves that the degree of freedom of the sexes in society has a marked bearing on the instability of married life. Where segregation of the sexes in society creates stability in married life, too much freedom creates the kind of instability in married life which ends in divorce.

Putting a stop to freedom in society could be an experimental verification of the restricted society being a proper society. Only the placing of restrictions in society can provide a deterrent to divorce. While the lack of restrictions in society weakens the fabric of family life and creates many social evils, constraints, on the other hand,

strengthen family bonds, which greatly benefits the human race in different ways.



NOTES

1. *Islam and the Modern Age*, Urdu Edition (New Delhi), January, 1973.
2. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* (1914), p. 31.
3. Ibid., p. 7
4. Ibid., p. 13.
5. Qur'an, 24:31.
6. Qur'an, 33:59.
7. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 31.
8. Qur'an, 33:33.
9. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 31.
10. Ibid., p. 56.
11. Ibid., p. 63.
12. Ibid., p. 65.
13. Ibid., p. 67.
14. Ibid., p. 77.
15. Ibid., p. 78.

Notes

16. Qur'an, 57:16.

17. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, op. cit., p. 80.

18. Ibid., p. 80.

19. Ibid., p. 110.

20. Qur'an, 24:31.

21. Abu Dawud, *Sunan*, *Kitab al-Libas*, 4/62.

22. Muhammad 'Ali as-Subuni, *Rawai' al-Bayan*, (Beirut, 1980), 2/155.

23. *At-Tafsir al-'Uthmani,* with notes by Shaikh Mahmud ul-Hasan (Bijnor, 1950), p. 458.

24. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), vol. 7, p.163.